

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHMO #4247/01 2420253
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 300253Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3398
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 004247

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/28/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UK](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIA CALLS STATEMENTS ABOUT ITS RECONSIDERATION
OF THE BIG TREATY WITH UKRAINE A "MISUNDERSTANDING"

REF: MOSCOW 4065

Classified By: POLITICAL M/C ALICE G. WELLS FOR REASONS
1.5 (b, d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Russian Ambassador-at-large for Black Sea Fleet issues Vladimir Dorokhin told us its diplomatic spat with Ukraine over alleged statements made by a Russian diplomat regarding Russia's legal claim on the Crimea is a "dead issue." Russia characterized as a misunderstanding the Kyiv-based Russian diplomat's alleged statements that Russia would reconsider its recognition of Crimea as Ukrainian territory if Ukraine raised Russia's rental payments for docking its Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. Dorokhin conceded that Ukraine is pressuring Russia to allow it greater access to its Black Sea Fleet naval base to conduct an inventory of assets and the result of the inventory could mean higher rental payments for Russia, but he stressed that senior Russian and Ukrainian officials have agreed to talk about rental payments only after the completion of the inventory. Dorokhin also noted that Russia and Ukraine have agreed to delay talks on the status of the Black Sea Fleet beyond the 2017 withdrawal date until much later in the future. End Summary.

Press Highlights Diplomat's Alleged Statements About Crimea

¶2. (U) Russian press focused on alleged statements made by a senior diplomat in the Russian Embassy in Kyiv about Russia's preparedness to reconsider the validity of the 1997 Russia-Ukraine Big Treaty, which stipulates Russia's recognition of the Crimea as part of Ukrainian territory. Russian diplomat Vladimir Lysienko allegedly made these statements during a press roundtable at the Russian Embassy in Kyiv in response to questions about some Ukrainian politicians' calls for higher rent payments charged to Russia for stationing its Black Sea Fleet on the Crimean peninsula. Media reported Lysienko as saying that if Ukraine were to insist on higher rent payments, Russia would have to reconsider the validity of the Big Treaty. These alleged statements prompted Kyiv to send a formal demarche to Moscow to seek an official confirmation of Lysienko's statements.

"Russian Diplomat's Statement Taken Out of Context"

¶3. (C) Russian Ambassador-at-large for Black Sea Fleet issues Vladimir Dorokhin confirmed for us on August 28 that, as far as Russia is concerned, the issue over Lysienko's statement "is dead." Dorokhin unequivocally Russia's recognition of Crimea as Ukrainian territory. He explained that both the 1997 Russia-Ukraine Big Treaty and the 2001 border treaty serve as the basis for Ukraine's legal claim to Crimea, and no Russian official "has seriously contemplated" revisiting either of these bilateral agreements.

14. (C) Dorokhin maintained that "Lysienko could not and would not" have said that Russia would reconsider its commitments under the Big Treaty. He added that after reviewing the audio recording of Lysienko's press roundtable, the Russian embassy in Kyiv confirmed that Dorokhin did not make such statements. The Russian MFA publicly denied that its diplomat made such allegations, citing misinterpretation by the journalists, and summoned a senior Ukrainian diplomat in Moscow to formally protest Ukraine's "hasty demarche over inaccurate press reporting."

Higher Rent Payments Not An Issue of Discussion

15. (C) Dorokhin confirmed that the issue of higher rent payments is connected with Ukraine's insistence that it conduct an inventory and appraisal of some 5000 "immovable assets" leased to Russia in Crimea, as part of its national effort to take stock of all governmental property. Russia and Ukraine have held negotiations on the scope and nature of the inventory since 2001, and Dorokhin conceded that Ukraine wants to expedite the process. However, he stressed that Russia's concerns about the control of access to its military base must also be taken into account. Regardless, Dorokhin noted that both the Ukrainian and Russian leadership fully understand that the issue of higher rent payments should not be discussed until the inventory is completed. Dorokhin cited Ukrainian First Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Ogryzko's private statements to Moscow that Ukraine will not raise the subject of rent payments until the completion of the inventory. (Note: Russia currently pays USD 98 million per year. End note.)

"Politicians Playing an Unhelpful Role"

16. (C) Dorokhin complained that politicians in Ukraine and Russia are politicizing a technical issue. In the lead up to the parliamentary elections in Ukraine and Russia, politicians in both countries have made numerous "unhelpful and inflammatory" statements about the presence of Russian military forces on Ukrainian territory. Dorokhin characterized the strong rhetoric as unhelpful, although he recognized that the legal status of Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet are "hot political issues" in both countries. Despite the political appeal, Dorokhin assured us that the executive leaderships in Russia and Ukraine remain calm and objective about the status of the Black Sea Fleet. Dorokhin observed that senior Russian and Ukrainian officials "correctly view" the Black Sea Fleet issue as relatively minor compared to "more fundamental bilateral problems," such as Ukraine's entry into NATO and the World Trade Organization (prior to Russia) and the official status of the Russian language in Ukraine (reftel).

Status of Black Sea Fleet Beyond 2017

17. (C) Dorokhin stressed that the official position of Russia and Ukraine is that the status of the Black Sea Fleet beyond the previously agreed upon withdrawal date of 2017 will remain off the discussion table "for the foreseeable future." Noting that there are still 10 years left before the current agreement expires, Dorokhin insisted that both Russian and Ukrainian officials want to avoid further complicating an already complicated issue. He acknowledged that President Putin has made recent press statements indicating that Russia would be interested in maintaining the fleet in Sevastopol beyond 2017, but Dorokhin maintained that Putin has instructed the MFA not to put any pressure on Ukraine over the renewal of the fleet's lease agreement until he directs otherwise.

18. (C) Dorokhin added that Russia's long-term goal is to set up the naval base in Novorossiysk by 2020 and convert the Novorossiysk naval base into its main naval base in the Black Sea. He stressed that these are Russia's working plans,

regardless of the status of Russia's naval base in Sevastopol beyond 2017. If Ukraine agrees to renew the lease in Sevastopol, the Novorossiysk naval base would still serve as the primary naval base in the Black Sea. Given Ukraine's "dramatic shift to the West," Dorokhin noted that Russian leadership is focused on setting up a Black Sea naval base on its own territory.

Comment

19. (C) The Russian MFA is sticking with the story that its diplomat's comments regarding the Black Sea Fleet and the Big Treaty were taken out of context, and from Russia's perspective, the issue has been put to rest. Despite tensions in bilateral relations that bubble to the surface, the GOR continues to put a positive spin on its engagement with Ukraine.
Burns